

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Employment Regimes and the Quality of Work*, Edited by  
Duncan Gallie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007,  
xvi + 277 pp., ISBN 978-0-199230-10-5.

Braham Dabscheck

Volume 64, numéro 2, printemps–spring 2009

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/037932ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/037932ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

### Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

### ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

### Citer ce compte rendu

Dabscheck, B. (2009). Compte rendu de [*Employment Regimes and the Quality of Work*, Edited by Duncan Gallie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, xvi + 277 pp., ISBN 978-0-199230-10-5.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 64(2), 354–355. <https://doi.org/10.7202/037932ar>

---

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 2009

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

---

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

professionnel ? D'autre part, la méthode des congruences organisationnelles pose que seuls les acteurs concernés peuvent analyser leur propre travail, en affirmant qu'une analyse réalisée par un chercheur externe à la situation de travail, telle qu'elle est habituellement réalisée en ergonomie, est « discutable ». Ce point de vue ne va pas de soi et mériterait d'être explicité : les démarches d'analyse de l'activité humaine par une personne extérieure sont-elles discutables du point de vue de la validité (parce qu'une personne extérieure ne peut par définition comprendre entièrement le vécu des acteurs mais seulement l'appréhender au travers du « filtre » de ses préoccupations) ou de l'objectif poursuivi (par exemple, redonner du pouvoir aux acteurs en les outillant pour analyser leur propre travail) ? Nombreux sont ceux qui croient qu'une analyse de l'activité par une personne extérieure, en supposant des modalités de validation et des précautions méthodologiques, peut produire une description valide de l'activité humaine, y compris dans ses dimensions subjectives. Plus largement, dans les deux méthodes, la recherche est présentée comme ayant fondamentalement une visée de développement, qui serait incompatible avec une visée de production de connaissances, qu'elle soit explicative ou de compréhension. Or, les auteurs n'explicitent pas en quoi ces visées sont incompatibles, ni ce qui distingue fondamentalement dans de telles démarches le rôle des chercheurs de celui d'autres acteurs de changement et de développement dans les milieux de travail, formateurs ou consultants par exemple.

Anabelle Viau-Guay  
Université Laval

### **Employment Regimes and the Quality of Work**

Edited by Duncan Gallie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, xvi + 277 pp., ISBN 978-0-199230-10-5.

This is an odd and disappointing volume. In the introduction we are told that quality of work issues have assumed "an increasingly central place in the social agenda of many European societies in the last decade of the twentieth Century" (p. 1). Moreover, various organs within the European Commission, plus national bodies within Europe, have produced

data sets "measuring" different aspects of quality of work. An issue, data sets; a marriage made in heaven for academics. Or, maybe not!

The introduction states that there is little empirical evidence "about how key aspects of the quality of work actually changed in different countries over the last decade" (the bibliography suggests that this statement is a straw man). It then says, "The objective of this book is to examine how far the available national and cross-national evidence for some of the major European societies enables us to address these questions and to begin to explore a range of arguments about the major determinants of work quality and their relative importance" (p. 3).

It might be useful to see this volume having a low and a high level object. The low object is that of reporting on what has happened; the high level being that of explaining such changes, and their relative importance, via a comparative method. The volume succeeds in its low level quest-it marshals and provides a commentary on the data which has become available – but fails, or rather gives up on its high level object.

The volume has three theoretical paradigms that it ostensibly seeks to explore. The first is universalistic theories associated with the rise of industrialization and the increasing use of technology. The optimistic approach of Kerr et al.'s *Industrialism and Industrial Man* is contrasted with the pessimism of Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. The second is to compare different production regimes. This is essentially a rerun of debates concerning "corporatist" and market based regimes in their ability to bring about better macroeconomic results. This has morphed into discussions concerning the efficacy of coordinated and market based economies in enhancing the quality of work. The third paradigm is designated as employment regimes and centres on "the role attributed to organized labour in employment policy and employment regulation" (p. 17). For those who can remember the heyday of debates about corporatism the role of unions in decision making was an essential ingredient of what is now called "production regimes". The theoretical constructs, particularly the distinc-

tion between production and employment regimes, lack robustness.

The dimensions of work quality examined are job skills, job related training, task discretion, work and family life balance and job insecurity. Job skills and job related training are biased towards formal training, which can occur at different locations – national, industry and firm. A major problem here is not taking account of informal on the job training. Human capital theory posits that we acquire skills via both formal and on the job training (learning by doing). It is hard to impossible to know how to measure or proxy the latter. The problem is that because that part of training that we cannot measure has been excluded from the analysis, it is difficult to obtain a complete picture of and know how to respond to various statements made by different contributors concerning skills and training.

The major nations examined are the Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Spain. Various chapters draw on other European countries where it is thought to be useful to enhance the discussion. The usual approach of the chapters is to examine previous research and theoretical/conceptual issues, data availability and problems, run various statistical tests, employ various dummies and proxies and then control or relax various variables in developing explanations. This in turn has produced narratives which provide caveats on qualifications, and qualifications on caveats, depending on the running of various statistical tests

As already mentioned the volume provides a lot of information on the various dimensions of work quality, its low level object. Its failure is in its high level object; explaining such changes, their relative importance (which is not addressed at all!), and why all this rig moral with a comparative approach. For example, in the chapter on job insecurity, it was found that Denmark has lower levels than other nations. The authors state however that: "The idea that the Danish model can be transferred in some simple and pure form to other countries is utopian. The institutional context that led to the emergence of the Danish model is very different from that in other countries . . . It is clear that an attempt

to imitate this model would be an impossible challenge given the specificity of the institutions that underlie it" (pp. 203-204).

More interestingly, in the final chapter, in contradiction to what was stated in the introduction, the editor says that "With evidence from a relatively limited number of countries, and given the ideal-type nature of the different regime constructs, the chapters have not sought to test these theories [illuminated in the introductory chapter] in any strict sense" (p. 223). A non strict scholar is an oxymoron. The volume's final paragraph reads as follows: "It is clear from the country comparisons that such regime categorizations are at best very broad brush. There are important variations between countries even within the inclusive regime category. An understanding of the factors that underlie such differences may be impeded by too strong an emphasis on analysis focusing on regime types. Regime analysis can complement, but not substitute for, the older tradition of 'societal' analysis which takes seriously the specificity of the historically derived institutional frameworks of particular countries" (pp. 231-232).

It is difficult to discern what the more narrowly based "societal" approach can achieve over and above a more broadly base comparative approach. This in turn raises other questions. If a "societal" approach is superior why was it not utilized in the first approach? What is the point of this volume? What can be learned from it? What needs to be done to enhance the quality of working life?

**Braham Dabscheck**  
University of Melbourne